

Southeast Region
Big Cypress National Preserve
Monroe Station
50910 Tamiami Trail East
Ochopee, FL, 33943

OVERVIEW

The Monroe Station was built in the late 1920's in conjunction with the Tamiami Trail, the first east-west route across southern Florida. As a means of providing traveler services to those making the trip from Naples to Miami, six stations were built along the route. The small two-story structures were approximately 12' deep and 24' wide and consisted of two rooms on each floor, from which a family would sell gas, provide comfort, serve as a base for a motorcycle patrol and reside. The original structures were 4 bays wide on the front (north) elevation facing the road. Two sets of double doors provided access to each of the two rooms on the first floor and an external set of stairs on the west elevation provided access to the second floor. Italianate detailing is evident in the low sloped hipped roof with wide overhangs and decorative brackets spaced approximately 2' apart.



The Monroe Station was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 for its association with transportation and settlement of southern Florida. It is the only surviving station that retains any of its historic integrity, though it has been altered significantly. During its history the small building was moved back from the road to allow for road widening, and the several additions were constructed:

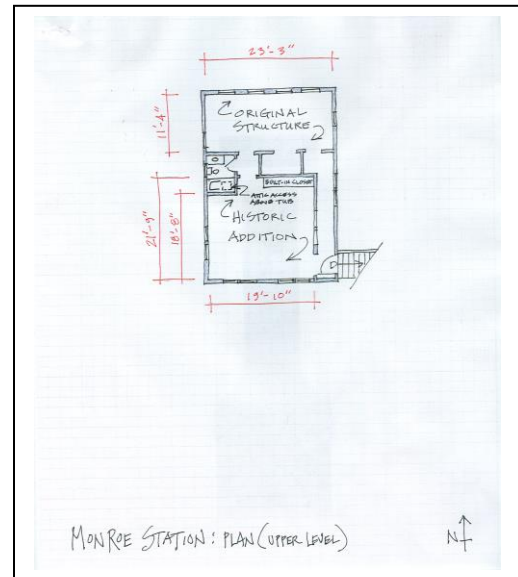
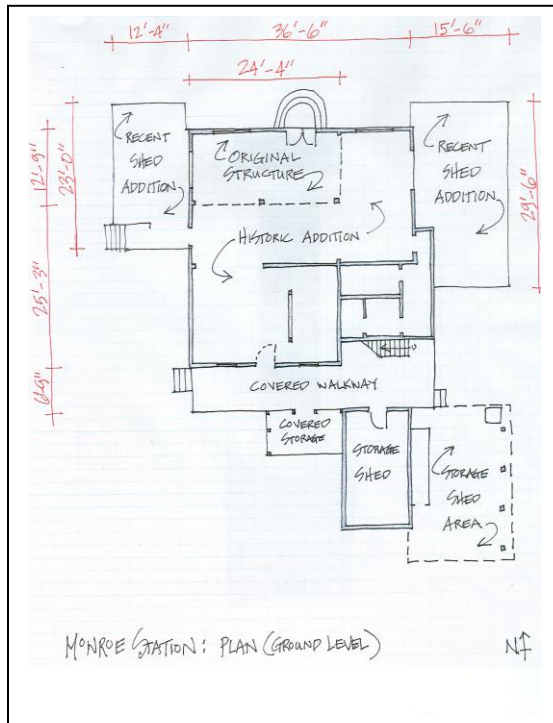
- An addition was constructed on the south side increasing the depth of the structure to 36' and altering the roof from a hipped roof on an east-west axis to a combination gable-hipped roof on a north-south axis.
- A shed addition to the east increased the width of the structure to approximately 36' (it is possible though not certain at this time if this initial east shed addition is contemporary with the south gable addition).
- A more recent shed addition extended the sloped roof and added an additional 24' of width to the east.
- A shed addition constructed on the west elevation appears to be contemporary with the later east addition.
- Several small storage sheds on the south elevation are connected by a covered breezeway. The stairs to the second floor are located in this breezeway.

Prior to being purchased by the National Park Service in the late 1980's, the structure maintained its historic use as a restaurant and filling station. After it changed hands, the building was closed up and received minimal attention. The unit's status as a National Preserve results in a focus on biological resources and a minimal amount of in-house expertise in Cultural Resources. Recent interest in the interpretation of the effect of the Tamiami Trail and modern human settlement on the natural environment has resulted in a movement to restore the Monroe Station to its 1930's appearance. Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) had been awarded a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation, was in the planning stages for undertaking a Historic Structures Report and had created a timeline for the restoration of the structure when Hurricane Wilma struck Florida on October 24, 2005.

The hurricane caused what initially appears to be severe damage to the structure: the two recent shed additions on the east and west elevations received significant structural damage. Emergency Incident Command crews were brought into the area to repair resources damaged by the storm. Bob DeGross, BICY Chief of Interpretation, requested that historic preservation specialists be brought to the site to inspect the structure and determine the proper course for stabilizing the structure.

The team consisted of Jim Creech, Historical Architect, Southeast Regional Office, and Sarah Polzin, Exhibit Specialist, Historic Preservation Training Center. Stabilization of the east and west shed additions was initially considered because the structure had not yet been thoroughly analyzed or documented. However, the team agreed that the extent of the damage, the time frame of the construction and the quality of the workmanship and materials did not justify the time and cost it would take to preserve the damaged spaces. Field drawings were completed which documented the footprints of these two additions in relation to the Central Core. All other recommendations were made with the goal of preserving as much of the existing fabric as possible.

The retention of fabric allows for its analysis and documentation during the completion of the Historic Structures Report. Once that is completed, the HSR can become the driving force for determining the planning and design phase of this project.



In these drawings, the “Original Structure” is delineated within the footprint of the “Historic Addition” which is referred to as Historic to differentiate it from the more recent additions.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

A. ORIGINAL STRUCTURE—

1. **Walls**—On the first floor the north and west walls are largely intact, though the window and door openings have been altered. A large picture window on the west was installed in place of a 1/1 window. On the north elevation a large multi-paned window appears to have replaced one of the two sets of double doors that are visible in the historic photographs. The walls are covered with modern press-board faux wood paneling. The ceiling is covered with 12” x 12” acoustic tile. In the southwest corner of the front room the tiles are falling off revealing 1x4 lath and wallboard. The south and east wall were replaced with posts and box beams when the structure was enlarged.

On the second floor the walls are intact and retain the window layout on the north and west elevations that is visible in the historic photographs. The window on the east elevation is a modern jalousie window with an opening below it for an air conditioning unit. The walls are again covered in the press-board paneling, some of which has been removed exposing wallboard and the ceiling is covered with 12”x 12” acoustic tiles attached to lath over wallboard. Approximately half of the tiles have fallen off and another

quarter of the tiles are in the process of falling off.

The walls are stud framing. There are some signs of termite damage in areas where missing siding has exposed the studs. However, there is no indication of major structural failure in the Original Structure.

2. **Roof**—The asphalt shingle roof, which covers both the historic core and the rear addition, was severely damaged during the hurricane. Approximately half of the shingles were blown off the west elevation and another dozen were blown off the east elevation.

Inside, the rafters of the extended roof are in good condition, though the fascia on the north side of the west elevation is missing, leaving the historic rafter tails exposed to the elements. The main problem at this time appears to be the leaking or missing turbine vents in several locations.

The roof structure visible from the exterior is a gabled roof added to the south face of the original hipped roof. Three faces of the original structure are still visible from the exterior while the fourth face, including the asphalt shingles, is intact under the modern roof.

3. **Foundation**—The entire structure is built on concrete blocks which are on a concrete pad. A concrete curb/flower bed encloses the north elevation. Debris or a concrete curb around the perimeter prevents access to the majority of the foundation. A few photos were taken through holes in the flooring and from those vantage points the floor system appears to be in good shape.

4. **Windows & Doors**—No historic windows or doors are extant on the first floor. The large multipaned picture windows on the north elevation have become a character-defining feature, though not associated with its period of significance. On the second floor, five windows on the north and west elevations may be original to the structure. Historic photographic documentation indicates the upstairs sash were 2/2. The existing sash are 2/1 and initial analysis of the sash does not indicate that the sash were modified. There was likely a window on the west elevation. The existing



The south portion of the original roof is extant beneath the gabled roof structure



View of the foundation system taken from the hole in the floor in the middle of the front room of the Central Core.

jalousie window probably replaced the historic sash. The double entrance doors on the north elevation are modern replacements

5. **Exterior**—Wood shiplap siding clads both the Original Structure and the Central Core. Approximately 10% of the siding is visibly deteriorated by termites and approximately 30 square feet of siding was blown off the north elevation during the storm. Paint is flaking off the entire structure. The decorative brackets are extant on the north elevation only.



View from within the footprint of the Original Structure looking west toward the initial shed addition. The post in the center of the photo indicates the southeast corner of the Original Structure. Note business cards on the walls.

CENTRAL CORE—Referred to in the drawing as the “Historic Addition”, the Central Core consists of the Original Structure, the two story addition to the south and the shed addition to the east. The interior of this space retains some of the elements indicating its former use: a restaurant-style stove hood, a bar, a display case and vinyl booths. Its walls are covered with the business cards of past patrons, a ubiquitous decorating theme in tourist areas and a tangible connection to the building’s status among the local and tourist population.

The sheet vinyl and 9” floor tiles are severely deteriorated, exposing the tongue and groove flooring beneath. There are three areas where the floor rotted away because of roof leaks or other means of water infiltration: adjacent to the front double doors, in the center of the first shed addition; and at the junction of the Central Core and the recent shed addition, directly above this hole the header is completely rotted. Despite the few areas of deteriorated flooring the floor system is generally sound.

The Central Core consists of a large front room with the Original Structure’s footprint delineated by the columns. To the south is the room that served as the kitchen. The second floor consists of a hallway which leads to an added room and to the Original Structure.

The windows are largely intact. However, one of the front doors is riddled with termite damage, resulting in its structural failure. The south door appears to have been broken in and is in pieces on the floor. The east exterior door is missing also. There are large openings on the east and west sides of the Core, one a doorway, the other probably a pass-through for restaurant staff.

There is the possibility that the 9” floor tile could contain asbestos, as could the roof shingles, underlayment or mastic. Most likely the paint throughout this structure is lead based. It is unclear if any other materials on the site would contain asbestos so a hazardous materials survey is required.

- B. **SHED ADDITIONS**—The west shed addition is held off the Original Structure approximately 4” and juts out from the northern plane of the Core approximately 4’. Its construction is of dimensional lumber and plywood, with some clapboard siding extant on the upper portion of the north elevation. A covered walkway on the south elevation is reached via three concrete stairs and provides access to a doorway into the Central Room. The rafters are toe-nailed to the clapboard siding and metal flashing is connected to the siding as well



The east shed addition received the most damage during the hurricane.

This addition is largely destroyed both from hurricane and termite damage. Plywood has been torn from the studs, unprotected windows and door openings expose the interior to the elements. The joists, sills and some of the studs are riddled with termite damage. The plywood flooring is spongy from termite damage.

Like the west addition, the east addition is constructed of dimensional lumber and plywood, and was devastated by the hurricane winds. The entire east wall was ripped off as was most of the roof for this room.

- C. **REAR ADDITIONS**—A covered breezeway leads from the south side of the Central Core to a small gabled building which is flanked by a shed on the east and a chicken coop of sorts on the west. A complex series of roofs unifies all these elements.

The east shed which is currently housing trail material, suffered some wind damage, resulting in the southwest corner of the shed collapsing. It fell approximately 2’ and is supported by the trail material. The central gabled structure is clad in 5-V crimp sheet metal and is in fair condition except for a roof vent that is letting in water. The west structure is topped with a shed roof, is open on the south side, butts against the gable shed on the east and is enclosed with galvanized wire fencing on the north and west.



The south view of the Monroe Station shows the multiple sheds that compose this utilitarian portion of the structure.

In general these structures are in fair condition and are in no danger of damaging the Central Core.

D. SITE—The Monroe Station is at the juncture of the Tamiami Trail and Loop Road, approximately 4 miles west of the Big Cypress National Preserve Visitor Center and 12 miles east of Ochopee Post Office. A large paved driveway and parking area to the north of the structure provides access to State Route 41, the Tamiami Trail. To the west a small shed acts as a check-in station for hunters. To the south a large mowed grassy area leads to swamp and is the site of the electrical hookup. Far to the east is a massive gravel pile used for trail construction. Currently the immediate perimeter of the Monroe Station is littered with debris from the hurricane. A chain link fence prevents access to the site from the road; however, the fence terminates in the field to south, making it possible for unauthorized access to the site. Two medium sized trees are adjacent to the structure: one on the south elevation and one on the east. These could eventually be detrimental to the structure in its current form both from the root system and breaking branches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. ORIGINAL STRUCTURE

Since the Original Structure is within the Central Core, there are no specific recommendations for this aspect of the structure in relation to the storm event.

B. CENTRAL CORE

1. Remove extraneous material from the interior of the central core. Remove shag carpeting from the upstairs rooms to minimize areas for mold to take hold. Remove the wood paneling from the upper room of the Original Structure to provide a better view of the wall framing. Remove ceiling tiles and insulation as well. The lath that the ceiling tiles are attached to can remain in place to prevent damage to the substrate at this time.
2. Secure building openings. Fabricate plywood doors to replace broken or missing exterior doors. After demolition of the east and west additions there will be large openings left. On the east side, frame in the doorway and cover with plywood. Reset the window in the upstairs northeast corner. Replace the bottom sash into proper position and re-install the weights in the pockets if possible.
3. Reshingle west side of roof, patch east side and remaining east shed roof. Install fascia board on northwest corner. Remove the turbine ventilators and re-shingle, or fabricate a cover to prevent water from penetrating the fins.
4. Construct and install ventilators on the east and west elevations to take advantage of the strong cross-winds and keep air moving through the structure

C. SHED ADDITIONS

1. Carefully “de-construct” the recent shed additions on the east and west elevations. The west addition can be totally removed up to the Original Structure’s west wall. Use caution when removing the framing elements attached and flashed against the Original Structure.
2. The removal of the east addition will be a little more complex in that it is a continuation of a previous addition which needs to remain. The recent east elevation floor structure can be removed/de-constructed up to the exterior wall of the initial addition, which includes a slight bump-out hallway along

the east elevation. The shed roof of this recent addition, however, needs to be de-constructed carefully to provide a minimum 1' overhang remaining to the initial addition. Salvage any shiplap siding from the additions to be removed for replacement of missing siding.

D. REAR ADDITIONS

1. Leave the rear additions in place for documentation and analysis during a Historic Structures Report.
2. Shore up the south west corner of the east shed. Remove trail material and store outside the Monroe Station to allow for access to the structure for documentation.
3. Patch the hole in the gabled shed to prevent further water damage.

E. SITE

1. Remove all debris from perimeter and dispose of properly.
2. Trim branches on two trees that abut the building, one on the south elevation and one on the east elevation, to prevent possible damage from broken limbs. The trees should not be cut down until the entire site is assessed.

F. GENERAL

1. Have possible asbestos containing materials tested. The only possible ACM noted during this brief survey was roofing and the 9" tiles in the Central Core. Though the asphalt shingles often do not contain asbestos, the underlayment or mastic may, but both should be tested.
2. Salvage any sound shiplap siding for replacement of deteriorated or missing siding. Remove nails from siding for ease of re-use. Store in a dry, ventilated, secure area.
3. Contact archivist about removal of cards from the wall and proper storage, inventory and documentation of these items or any other possible historic items.
4. Begin search for possible historic drawings/photos of Monroe Station

CONCLUSION

The continued existence of the Monroe Station provides a connection with the early modern settlement of southern Florida, and touches on the historical aspect of several interpretive topics, including early 20th century American movements, commerce, tourism, transportation and housing. Its location along Route 41 affords it an easy access to a vast tourist population and the existence of historic photographs provides a basis for the structure's restoration. The structure's immediate stabilization will preserve the historic fabric during the planning stages of this project.